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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001097

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN, EUR/SNEC, DRL

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: YEREVAN DASHNAKS DOWNPLAY DISAPPOINTMENT IN N-K
BALLOTING

REF: YEREVAN 1054

Classified By: DCM A.F. Godfrey for reasons 1.4(b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Local representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - "Dashnaksutyun") have been downplaying the results of the June 19 balloting in Nagorno-Karabakh in which their ARF/Movement 88 alliance (who many predicted would fare best in the election - reftel) won only three seats in the local "parliament." While awaiting the final results from the Central Election Commission, journalists and observers praised the balloting to the Armenian press as generally fair and transparent, Stepanakert-based ARF representatives, however, are reportedly compiling a list of purported violations and the use of "administrative resources" by government officials to unfairly skew the election results in favor of the ruling parties (who captured approximately 64 percent of the votes cast). Despite early threats that they might decline their three seats in protest, ARF representatives told us -- through their local counterparts -- that they would not publicly protest the elections as it might "unnecessarily threaten N-K security." End Summary.

YEREVAN DASHNAKS DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM N-K RESULTS

2. (C) Local representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - "Dashnaksutyun") have been downplaying the results of the June 19 balloting in Nagorno-Karabakh in which their ARF-Movement 88 alliance won only three seats in the parliament. A preliminary report published by the Central Election Commission stated that the ARF/Movement 88 coalition took 24.4 percent of the proportional vote. Giro Manoyan, Director of the ARF International Bureau, contradicted earlier statements and went to great lengths to portray the Armenia and N-K arms of the organizations as "unrelated" in terms of levels of popular support. He told us on June 22 that the balloting in Nagorno-Karabakh had "no bearing on the ARF's political standing in Armenia." ARF leaders made similar comments during press conferences on June 20 and 21 and steered clear of discussion of the purported electoral violations that N-K ARF leaders cited earlier over the weekend.

OBSERVERS GIVE "ELECTION" A PASSING GRADE

3. (C) Local NGOs and Diaspora-based organizations have reported to us that observers of the June 19 balloting called it transparent and well organized. Local press cited comments by the British Helsinki Association, Russian State Duma and Public International Law and Policy Group that the balloting was orderly and that access to monitors and press exceeded their expectations. Some estimates put the voter turnout as high as 78 percent of eligible N-K voters.

4. (C) Louis Sell (a former U.S. Foreign Service Officer) was among those who praised the election as "very correct." He reportedly told some of our contacts in Yerevan that N-K "President" Ghukassian had used rhetoric in advance of election day that many considered "playing the national security card" in favor of the ruling authorities. N-K "Foreign Minister" Melkonian reportedly learned of this perception, engaged foreign observers on their concerns and arranged for a follow-up meeting with Ghukassian during which he explained his comments to the observers.

CLAIMS OF VIOLATIONS, USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

5. (SBU) ARF groups in Stepanakert made claims to Yerevan-based press that "N-K authorities had used administrative resources to skew the results in their favor." The ARF's spokesperson told reporters that they were compiling a list of violations. Immediately following the CEC's release of the preliminary results, the ARF/Movement 88

said it would not stage public protests regarding the balloting (saying it would unnecessarily "threaten N-K security") but might instead decline their three seats in the "parliament" as a sign of protest. Beyond the initial announcement, however, there has been little mention of any such action from either part of the coalition.

COMMENT: EARLY INDICATOR OF DASHNAK DECLINE?

16. (C) While Yerevan Dashnaks take measures to distance themselves publicly from the ARF's defeat in N-K's "election," the results came as a surprise to local GOAM politicians and Embassies -- including us -- who predicted the Dashnaks would flex their political muscle in N-K as a precursor to national elections in Armenia in 2007 and 2008. National Assembly Deputy Speaker Vahan Hovanissian, the most likely ARF candidate for the next presidential bid in Armenia, will likely continue to burnish his image in national politics over the next 12 months and emphasize the ARF's image as a member of the ruling coalition in Yerevan. The June 19 balloting in N-K, however, suggests he will now have to battle the perception that the ARF's reach may be waning at the ballot box.
EVANS